

The work of recruiting volunteers is to invite church members to ministry of the church and in the community.

History and Background

The Bible tells the story of voluntary acts. It begins with the story of the creation of the universe, freely given by God. The New Testament tells that "... God so loved the world that (God) gave (God's) only Son ..." (John 3:16). Jesus voluntarily made the ultimate sacrifice. These voluntary acts are models for giving. God's sharing our common lot motivates people to work on behalf of the church.

The early church members were motivated by their understanding of Jesus and what was expected of them: "... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). When the disciples needed help in the witnessing, they didn't wait for people to volunteer; they appointed people (Acts 6:1-7).

Martin Luther recognized the basis for our voluntary acts: "We do not go to our neighbors because we seek God or that God will meet us there, but we go because God has first come to us and instilled within us a desire to give and share."

The terminology of **volunteers** has not always been used in referring to

church members as they carry out ministries. Volunteers are people who do tasks without financial compensation or without being forced.

Common Practices

You probably don't say, "I have to recruit volunteers." You may say, "I'm on the nominating committee, and I simply must find church members to serve on all those committees by next week." You may be a member of the Christian education committee "desperately searching for a junior-high teacher because Sam moved away." Maybe you're the program chairperson of the women's organization and you "have a dozen programs and the same group of women who led programs last year."

In most churches the nominating committee, often with the help of the pastor, finds people to fill vacancies in the ongoing committees and organizations. Sometimes that means that one person can serve in the same position for years and years because that makes for one less position to fill. Often it means that the same little group of people do most of the jobs, although they rotate each year.

Sometimes the method of recruiting volunteers is to ask someone on Sunday morning, soft sell the requirements and do a little pushing to get a "yes." Other churches have a general request for volunteers and a sign-up list they pass around.

Some churches have undertaken a ministry of volunteers program. The ministries that make up the church's mission have been identified and described and community agencies have been investigated to find out what kind of volunteer ministry opportunities are available. There are descriptions of each volunteer ministry position in the church and knowledge of what the church members can do and want to do. Someone has matched the needs of the church and community with the needs and skills of the church members. Then people are asked to serve in those ministries.

Recruiters are responsible for finding persons to carry out the ministries of the church--finding committee members, church officers, board members--and for finding ministries that fulfill the needs of the volunteers. The needs of the church must be balanced with the needs of the volunteers. The ministry of the church isn't limited just to the church's committees, and the members' interests go beyond the local church.

Some churches have engaged a structured process of discerning and understanding individuals' gifts for ministries, both in volunteer work and in all their lives. This approach assumes that the church is called to its mission through its members, and that understanding of gifts is a key to the mission of the whole church.

Responsibilities

You will have a better opportunity for success in recruiting volunteers when you are responsible for:

- Knowing what each of the church's volunteer ministries involves.
- Knowing about positions in the association, conference and national settings of the church.
- Knowing about positions in community agencies.
- Communicating accurate and adequate information about the volunteer ministry to the volunteer, including a written description of the activities, the time required to carry it out, skills needed and training and support available.
- Knowing what the volunteers' skills and interests are and matching them to the positions. You will have to develop some way of discovering skills and interests. Most churches use a simple questionnaire which they ask all church members to fill out indicating skills, interests and amount of time they are interested in volunteering. You may discover surprises in the interests because sometimes people who use their skills all week want their volunteer time to be very different. You may find that, rather than asking the accountant to be treasurer, you should ask her to serve as a deacon.
- Telling the volunteers what the particular skills or interests are that helped you choose them for this position.

- Letting the volunteer make choices between several ministries that are suitable.
- Finding a volunteer ministry for all church members.
- Talking to the volunteers in person in a comfortable setting.
- Recruiting all church members for volunteer ministries that provide for growth, give responsibility and match their interests and concerns.

Skills and Attributes Needed

- A commitment to the mission of the church to be carried out by the volunteer ministries for which you're seeking volunteers.
- Understanding of what motivates volunteers.
- Comfort with the task.
- Straightforwardness and clarity.
- Ability to listen.
- An understanding of what skills are needed for different tasks.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Practice a recruitment call with other recruiters or your family before going to ask people to volunteer.
- Ask people who have been recruited how well it worked.
- Ask for a church program to help members identify gifts for ministry.

- Develop an understanding of the skills and interests of church members and friends.

Issues Facing the Church

- The potential for volunteer hours has become more limited. How has the church dealt with the change? What might we consider?
- What is the responsibility of the church for recruiting volunteers for community agencies among the church members?
- How can the recruiters relate the needs of the church to the needs of the volunteers for meaningful ministry opportunities?

Questions

- How do you feel about talking about church members as "volunteers"?
- How does your church find information about skills and interests of church members? Does this need improvement?
- How does your church collect information about positions in the church and community? What could it do to improve?
- How does your church recruit volunteers? What could it do to improve?